

FROM A MARTYROLOGICAL 'TABERNACULA PASTORUM' TOWARDS A GEOGRAPHICAL 'IN MERIDIE':

AUGUSTINE'S REPRESENTATION AND REFUTATION OF THE DONATIST EXEGESIS OF SG. 1, 6-7

Introduction

In the debate on which church would be the Church of Christ, Augustine and the Donatists utilized the principle of *sola Scriptura* to ground their claims: both read Song of Songs 1, 6-7 as a key passage for locating the Church. Because no Donatist documents have survived, scholars unfortunately know this exegetical-ecclesiological debate only through Augustine's eyes.

As a case study of Augustine's anti-Donatist exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7, the first part of this article considers *sermo* 46.¹ *Sermo* 46 clearly belongs to Augustine's homiletic campaign against the Donatists.² The delivery of this long sermon probably lasted more

¹ "Im Kontext des Religionsprozesses findet eine Auseinandersetzung Augustins mit einer donatistischen Auslegung von Hld 1, 6-8 statt, die sonst sowohl in den Predigten als auch in den Schriften fast gänzlich fehlt. Es handelt sich somit um eine Besonderheit innerhalb des Mediums Predigt. M.E. ist durchaus denkbar, dass sich an dieser Stelle ein Originalargument der Donatisten erhalten hat, alles andere hätte zu leicht als Fälschung entlarvt werden können. Da sich diese Auseinandersetzung besonders um 411 beobachten lässt, könnte es möglich sein, dass Augustin hier unmittelbar auf eine 'neue' bzw. erneute Predigt-offensive der pars Donati reagiert und seinen Gemeindegliedern vor Augen führt, was sie von diesem Argument zu halten haben und wie sie ihrerseits agieren können, wenn sie mit ihm konfrontiert werden." I. THOLEN, *Die Donatisten in den Predigten Augustins. Kommunikationslinien des Bischofs von Hippo mit seinen Predighören* (Arbeiten zur Historischen und Systematischen Theologie, 16), Berlin, Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2010, p. 286.

² For the broader background of s. 46 in the Donatist controversy, see: P. BROWN, *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, London, Faber and Faber, 1972, p. 315: s. 46, 23 (Augustine's *instantia* towards the Donatists); P. BROWN, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography. A New Edition with an Epilogue*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2000, p. 216:

than one hour.³ We will reconstruct Augustine's exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7 in said sermon, and will report parallel explanations in other parts of his œuvre in the footnotes. The footnotes will also contain the state of the art of the presence of this sermon in the *Augustinus-Forschung*.

The second part of our article will consist of an attempt to reconstruct another possible Donatist reading of the two verses of the Song of Songs, different from the one presented by Augustine. We will suggest that the core of the Donatist exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7 was a martyrological reading of '*tabernacula pastorum*', while we think that Augustine could have tactically shifted the listeners' attention towards a geographical interpretation of '*in meridie*'.

Augustine's *Sermo* 46⁴

Sermo 46 is traditionally dated to 409-410 (e.g. by A. Kunzelmann, R. A. Markus, P. Monceaux, I. Tholen) because of a possible link with *epistulae* 106-108.⁵ P.-M. Hombert however argues that this is neither a strong nor a conclusive link. Initially he

s. 46, 35, p. 223; s. 46, 15, p. 330; s. 46, 14. An example of this broader background is s. 46, 15, where Augustine deplores conversions to Donatism for pragmatic reasons (cf. *infra*) and where the interim administrator appointed by Secundus—because he considered Caecilian's election as unconfirmed—is called a 'visitor' by Augustine. Cf. W. H. C. FRENCH, *The Donatist Church. A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1952, p. 19.

³ M. PONTET, *L'exégèse de Saint Augustin prédicateur* (Théologie, 7), Paris, Aubier, 1946, p. 62 (n. 139).

⁴ For the critical edition and manuscript transmission of s. 46, see: C. LAMBOT, *Le sermon XLVI de saint Augustin 'De Pastoribus'*, in *Revue Bénédictine*, 63 (1953), p. 165-210.

⁵ I. Tholen offers the following overview: "Mitte 410 Monceaux; 409-411 Kunzelmann; gegen 410 Perler; nach dem 17. Juni 414 [loi sur les testaments] Lambot; gegen 408 Beuron; 409-410 Mandouze; eventuell 410-411 la Bonnardière." A. KUNZELMANN, *Die Chronologie der Sermones des Hl. Augustinus*, in: *Miscellanea Agostiniana 2: Studi Agostiniani*, Roma, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1931, p. 417-520, p. 443. R. A. MARKUS, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 121-123; P. MONCEAUX, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne. VII. Saint Augustin et le Donatisme*, Paris, Leroux, 1923, p. 163. I. THOLEN, *Die Donatisten...* [see n. 1], p. 35.

situates the sermon between 410-411.⁶ Later, in his 'new chronology', he proposes to date it between 407-408, because of links with *Epistula* 93 of 408, especially Sg. 1, 6 (*ep.* 93, 24 & s. 46, 35-37) and Sg. 1, 7-8 (*ep.* 93, 24-25 & s. 46, 35-37).⁷ E. Hill thinks the sermon was delivered in Carthage, because Augustine preaches in §39: '*In Numidia unde ventum est huc cum tanto malo...*', while he had declared previously in the sermon that the Numidian clergy went to Carthage to start the Donatist schism there. Hill adds that one hears in §8 a "high life that would only really fit a metropolitan city like Carthage, and not a provincial town like Hippo."⁸

Bad shepherds

In *sermo* 46, the preacher Augustine intends to clarify the liturgical reading which preceded his homily, namely Ez. 34 (he quotes/refers to verses 1-16 and 25 in the sermon). This scriptural passage inspires Augustine to preach about 'bad shepherds', who long for the title of 'shepherd' without fulfilling its duties.⁹ The word *pastores* clearly refers to bishops for Augustine.¹⁰ He accuses

⁶ P.-M. HOMBERT, *Gloria gratiae. Se glorifier en Dieu, principe et fin de la théologie augustinienne de la grâce*, (Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité, 148), Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 1996, p. 19.

⁷ P.-M. HOMBERT, *Nouvelles recherches de chronologie augustinienne* (Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité, 163), Paris, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2000, p. 553-554. Cf. R. GRYSO, B. FISCHER, H. J. FREDE, *Répertoire général des auteurs ecclésiastiques latins de l'Antiquité et du Haut moyen âge*, 5^e édition mise à jour du *Verzeichnis der Sigel für Kirchenschriftsteller* (Vetus Latina, Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel, 1/1), Freiburg, Herder, 2007, p. 234.

⁸ J. E. ROTELLE (ed.), E. HILL (trans., notes), *Sermons II (20-50), On the Old Testament*, (The Works of Saint Augustine. A translation for the 21st Century, III/2), Brooklyn – New York, New City Press, 1990, p. 292.

⁹ S. 46, 1.

¹⁰ For the broader context of s. 46, 13.30 in Augustine's anti-Donatist recourse on the parable of the 'good shepherd' (Jn. 10) and his designating the Donatist bishops as bad shepherds, see: F. GENN, *Trinität und Amt nach Augustinus*, Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1986, p. 244-245; O. PERLER, *Le 'De unitate' (chap.IV-V) de saint Cyprien interprété par saint Augustin*, in *Augustinus Magister (Congrès international augustinien Paris, 21-24 sept. 1954, Communications)* (Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité, 2), Vol. 2, Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1954, p. 835-858 (849-850); I. THOLEN, *Die Donatisten...* [see n. 1], p. 220.

the ‘bad shepherds’ of only striving for their own benefit instead of Christ’s (Phil. 2, 21),¹¹ claiming that they only feed themselves instead of feeding their sheep.¹² Moreover, he accuses the ‘bad shepherds’ of living badly and setting a bad example (and hence ‘killing the good sheep’);¹³ of seducing the sheep to look only for *deliciae* instead of imitating Christ’s suffering;¹⁴ and of not preparing their flock for the trials of this world.¹⁵ Finally, when Augustine rebukes the ‘bad shepherds’ for not seeking after the lost sheep, he tacks his sermon on an anti-Donatist course. He explains that the erring sheep are *haeretici*, especially Donatus is a *haeticus*. Donatists are stubborn sheep who refuse to return to their shepherds and folds; for though “they are sought when they go astray, they say in the error of their ways and their perdition that they don’t belong to us.”¹⁶

Augustine, urged by the content of Ez. 34, 4, however does not intend to give in to that Donatist refusal, claiming, “I’m not afraid of you. After all, you can’t overturn the judgment seat of Christ and set up the judgment seat of Donatus.”¹⁷

The preacher of Hippo does not only react against ‘bad shepherds’, he also warns the sheep—especially the Donatists—not to follow these ‘bad shepherds’.¹⁸ In short, the bishop of Hippo repudiates Donatist *superbia* and their breaking of ecclesial unity.¹⁹

¹¹ S. 46, 2.

¹² S. 46, 2-3.13.

¹³ S. 46, 9.

¹⁴ S. 46, 10.

¹⁵ S. 46, 8.10.20.

¹⁶ S. 46, 14.

¹⁷ S. 46, 14: Augustine takes his ‘apostolic’ duty to bring erring Christians back very passionately: M. PONTET, *L’exégèse...* [see n. 3], p. 108 (n. 339).

¹⁸ S. 46, 15-16.

¹⁹ S. 46, 17-18. As in his other anti-Donatist writings, Augustine considers the Donatist rupture of the unity of *caritas*, their schism/division as their gravest sin (of *superbia*). See also: P. BORGOMEIO, *L’Église de ce temps dans la prédication de Saint Augustin* (Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité, 48), Paris, Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1972, p. 253-273 [s. 46, 18: 253 (n. 1) ; 254 (n. 7) ; 257 (n. 29) ; 261 (n. 54)]. E. LAMIRANDE, *La situation ecclésiologique des Donatistes d’après saint Augustin*, Ottawa, Éditions de l’université d’Ottawa, 1972, p. 26, 58, 76-78 (*superbia* as root of the schism), 96, 111-114 (terminology of *pars/parti*), 135-136 (terminology of *praecidere*). S. 46, 29: Augustine renounces the cunning of *haeretici* (show-

The one voice of the one Shepherd²⁰

Augustine urges his listeners to follow the one shepherd, Christ.²¹ All good shepherds are to be found in the one shepherd Christ, are one (within the *caritas* unity of the Church), and speak the one voice of Christ.²² *Haeretici* do not speak with this one voice of the shepherd Christ.²³ Augustine first quotes a Donatist refrain and subsequently reacts against it:

ing as such that they are sons of the devil): "Now they say: 'we don't want to quarrel,' because they have already been caught. He isn't in a position to say 'I don't want to quarrel.' You captive you, once upon a time it was certainly you that found fault at the beginning of your rebellion with the betrayers, that condemned the innocent, sought the emperor's judgment, didn't accept the judgment of the bishops, appealed so often after losing the case, kept the litigation going so insistently at the emperor's court." For the link between the Donatists and the devil (looking for a prey)/the false shepherd (s. 46, 28-29.31); see: S. POQUE, *Le langage symbolique dans la prédication d'Augustin d'Hippone*, Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 1984, p. 20.

²⁰ S. 138, devoted to Jn. 1, 11-16 ("I am the good shepherd") against the Donatists (and in this context elaborating on Sg. 1, 6-7, cf. *infra*), takes its liturgical reading as an occasion to explain the *boni pastoris officium*, applying it—in an anti-Donatist way—to genuine martyrs. True martyrs spilt their blood out of love for the flock and not because of pride (s. 138, 1-2.4). The unity of the Church is symbolized by the many good shepherds (Peter, Paul, Cyprian) who refer to the one shepherd, Christ, who unites all sheep (s. 138, 3.5, cf. s. 138, 7: referring to Sg. 1, 4: the unity of the bridegroom's/king's bedchamber). Referring to Sg. 1, 7 (8), Augustine urges hearers to remain with the one flock and to not be seduced by the other flocks (of the *haeretici*). "If you do not know yourself, go out, you, in the tracks of the flocks, and graze your goats in the tabernacles of the shepherds (Sg. 1, 8) Go out in the tracks, not of the flock but of the flocks, and graze, not like Peter my sheep, but your goats; in the tabernacles, not of the shepherd, but of the shepherds; not of unity, but of division, not established in the place where there is one flock and one shepherd. By this answer she has been stiffened, built up, made stronger as the beloved wife, ready to die for her husband and live with her husband." (s. 138, 8.) The bride of Sg. 1, 6-7 is precisely the bride of the shepherd: defiled by sin, cleansed by the grace of the shepherd. "*Merito huic pastori pastorum, amata eius, sponsa eius, pulchra eius, sed ab ipso pulchra facta, prius peccatis foeda, post indulgentia et gratia formosa, loquitur amans et ardens in eum, et dicit ei, «ubi pascis?»*" (s. 138, 6).

²¹ S. 46, 23-26.

²² S. 46, 30.

²³ S. 46, 31-32. For s. 46, 31 as indication of a possible physical presence of Donatists in the basilica during the sermon: A. MANDOUZE, *Saint Augustin. L'aventure de la raison et de la grâce*, Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1968, p. 640.

‘But they betrayed the sacred books, and they offered incense to idols, so-and-so and so-and-so.’ What do I care about so-and-so and so-and-so? If they did that, they are not shepherds. What you’ve got to do is utter the voice of the shepherd, because not even about them, about so-and-so and so-and-so, are you proclaiming the voice of the shepherd. It’s you who are accusing them, not the gospel, not the prophet, not the apostle. I will believe it about someone of whom that voice speaks to me; I won’t believe others. But you have court records to produce; I have court records to produce. Let us believe yours; you too must believe mine. I don’t believe yours; don’t you believe mine. Take away human documents, let divine words be heard.²⁴

Augustine adds that every single page of Scripture speaks about Christ and the universal Church, and not about Donatus and his party. Although the Donatists pretend to listen to the voice of the shepherd Christ, they actually listen to the wolf.

First reply to a Donatist Sg. 1, 6-7: preference for clearer Bible texts, which demonstrate ecclesial universality²⁵

Augustine enters into dialogue with a fictitious Donatist, who objects:

²⁴ S. 46, 33. “In one of his longest sermons, the magnificent *On the Shepherds* [s. 46], a prolonged castigation of ‘the Donatists’ as enemies, he reran the whole history of the conflict. He placed the act of betrayal at its center, but only to turn the tables on the dissidents: it was *they* who had betrayed themselves and the church by their dogged and prolonged litigating of the case. He put the typical dissident charge into the mouths of one of his sectarian enemies. [Citation of s. 46, 33: Donatist accusation of betraying the sacred books and offering incense. Augustine’s answer regarding court records.] That is to say, no one can really be certain what the written records really said, so any condemnation of some men as traitors based on some carefully hoarded human documents was uncertain at best. Persons in the present cannot be held liable for the actions of men in the long-distant past, even if they did do what they are averred to have done. The other side of this coin was the Catholic claim that many of the dissidents were themselves polluted with the stain of betrayal, a point that Augustine made in his epic sermon twinned with *On the Shepherds*, the monumental *On the Sheep* [s. 47, 17].” B. D. SHAW, *Sacred violence: African Christians and sectarian hatred in the age of Augustine*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 104-105.

²⁵ In *Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 24, 69, refuting Donatist biblical argumentation for their baptismal sacramentology, Augustine gives the Donatist appropriation of Sg. 1, 6-7 as an example of their faulty exegesis. Previously, in the same tractate, Augustine stressed that Bible

'We too utter the shepherd's voice'. ... In the Songs of Songs ... the bride speaks to the bridegroom, the Church to Christ. ... The bride ... says to the bridegroom: 'Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you feed your flock, where you lie down'. ... [He] replies, 'in the noonday' (Sg. 1, 6).²⁶

In the first instance, referring to Ps. 2, 8 and 22, 7,²⁷ Augustine replies that it is only too evident that the Church is universal, that the Donatist exegesis of Sg. 1, 6 as an argument of the African nature of the Church is wrong. Moreover, Augustine observes that the text of Sg. 1, 6 is not a clear text. He advises the Donatists to cling to open (*aperta*) Bible texts, and in doing so the less clear (*obscura*) texts will become clear. He reproaches the Donatists, asking, "how can you penetrate obscure passages if you shrug aside the plain ones?"²⁸

Second reply to a Donatist Sg. 1, 6-7: incorrect interpunction²⁹

Despite the fact that Augustine already gave obvious Scriptural examples of the Church's universality, and he displayed

texts that could substantiate the Donatist claim of the non-universality of the Church do not exist (*Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 16, 43). He advises them, instead of building their case on the unclear Sg. 1, 6-7, to read the following texts, which do not need additional explanation, and which clearly reveal the universality of the Church: Jes. 62, 4; Ps. 21, 28-29; Lk. 24, 46-47; Acts 1, 8; Mt. 24, 14 (*Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 19, 51).

²⁶ S. 46, 35.

²⁷ For Ps. 21 (22) in s. 46, 33.35, see: H. R. DROBNER, *Psalm 21 in Augustine's Sermones ad populum: Catecheses on Christus totus and rules of interpretation*, in *Augustinian Studies*, 37 (2006), p. 145-169 (153-154, 163).

²⁸ S. 46, 35.

²⁹ *Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 16, 40 indicates concisely that 'in meridie' belongs to the question of the bride/Church (who says: 'not as a veiled woman'), and is not the beginning of the answer of the bridegroom/Christ (who says: 'if you do not recognize yourself') (cf. s. 138, 10). In s. 147A, 3 – in the context of Augustine preaching on Jn. 21, 15-17 – he says: "The Donatists are in the habit of reading into these words their own meaning, not the meaning of the scriptures. You see, this is what they are in the habit of saying: Africa is the noonday, Africa is the noon-day or south of the world. That's why the Church asks the Lord, 'Where do you graze, where do you lie down?' And he answers, 'In the noonday'; as much as to say, 'Don't look for me anywhere except in Africa.' Read and understand it properly, heretical mind. A mirror is now being held up to you; find yourself here. Understand that the bride is still asking the question; why

hesitancy regarding the clearness of the content of Sg. 1, 6-7, he nevertheless starts to explain this Bible passage. In this text, Augustine agrees with the Donatists: the bride is speaking to the bridegroom, the Church to Christ.³⁰ However, he is of the opinion that the Donatists use an incorrect interpunction when reading the passage. As such, they read 'in the noonday' as the beginning of the answer of the bridegroom, while it actually is the end of the preceding question of the bride. So the bride is actually asking the bridegroom where he rests 'in the noonday', and 'in the noonday' is not the reply of the bridegroom. Augustine derives this from the continuation of the text 'lest perchance I come as one veiled upon the flocks of your compassion'. Grammatically, 'veiled' (*operta*) is clearly feminine, hence it refers to the bride.³¹

Third and fourth replies to a Donatist Sg. 1, 6-7: Sg. 1, 6-7 should not refer to Africa,³² and when it does it is directed against the Donatists³³

Augustine rhetorically begins to turn the tables. First, he observes that the Donatist reading is not correct. Subsequently, he

do you already bring in the bridegroom answering? At least recognize the feminine gender: Where do you graze, where do you lie down in the noonday? Lest perchance I come like a veiled woman'. 'Veiled woman', I rather think, is feminine, not masculine."

³⁰ For the vocabulary of 'bride-bridegroom' in Augustine's sermons (and here in s. 46, 30), see: P. BORGOMEIO, *L'Église...* [see n. 19], p. 235-241 [s. 46: 236 (n. 8); 239 (n. 21); 241 (n. 37)].

³¹ S. 46, 36.

³² Augustine collects several alternative meanings for '*in meridie*'. First of all, geographically, he thinks other regions are more likely to be indicated by '*in meridie*'. It could refer to Egypt, because this region actually lies more in the middle than Africa (which is turned to the '*Africus*', and not to the '*Austrus*'—the real middle) and because of the desert fathers there (this is linked with the symbolic meaning of '*in meridie*', cf. *infra*). Egypt is, according to Augustine, hence more a place of rest (referring to Sg. 1, 6: 'where will you take your rest'), rather than the troubled Africa with its tumultuous hordes of *circumcelliones* (*Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 16, 41; 19, 51). S. 138, 10 follows this line of argument: Egypt fits better the description: 'South', 'under the midday sun', and there the Lord has a large flock of holy men and women. Augustine also offers the *prouincia Byzacium Tripolis* as a possible better geographical specification than Africa for '*in meridie*'. Here we see the rhetorician at work, because this is precisely the region where the Maximianists—an internal Donatist

starts to explain that the text of Sg. 1, 6-7 is essentially directed against the Donatists. He notices that the bridegroom speaks in a firm way to the bride, indicating a situation of danger.³⁴ Indeed, the bride is afraid. She fears to 'stumble upon the flocks/companions' who have broken the unity of the table,³⁵ who went outside,

schism—are located (*Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 19, 51; *Ep.* 93, 9.24-25.28). Secondly, according to Augustine, 'in meridie' does not have specifically a literal geographical meaning, but rather a symbolic spiritual meaning, namely as reference to people who live in the splendor of truth and in the fervor of charity (Ps. 89 (90), 12; *Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 16, 41; 19, 51; s. 295, 5; s. 138, 7; *Ep.* 93, 9.24-25.28). (Cf. s. 198, 14: as explanation of Is. 14, 13.14: "I will set my throne in the North, and I will be like the most High", Sg. 1, 16 is quoted as indicating the South. "Opposite the southern region, of course, is the northern one; that's why it stands for spirits that are cold and darkened, while the South stands for those that are enlightened and fervent. So those who are good, as in the South, are fervent and shining brightly, while those who are bad, as in the North, are cold and covered with dark, dense fog. God feeds his flock and lies down in the South among the former...".)

³³ The most repeated refrain of Augustine is that when 'in meridie' really stands for Africa, Sg. 1, 6-7 has an anti-Donatist significance, i.e. the bride is the overseas Church who does not want to 'stumble' into the Donatist schism in Africa. This refrain we hear, for instance, in ss. 147A, 3; 138, 10. Augustine explains that the overseas Church/the bride fears the Donatists as the 'companions' (the *haeretici*, who 'went out from us' [1 Jn 2:19]) of Sg. 1, 7, because they lack charity, do not recognize the universality of the Church and break ecclesial unity (s. 138, 9-10; s. 147A, 4; s. 295, 5; *Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 16, 40). In the context of the fear of the bride 'to be veiled', Augustine frequently quotes Mt. 5, 14 ("A town built on a hill cannot be hidden"), which we can read as an anti-Donatist reference to the universality of the Church (*Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 16, 40; *Ep.* 93, 9.24-25.28; s. 295, 5). For Augustine's reaction against the Donatist's territorial reduction of the Church to Africa (based on their exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7), see: P.-M. BOGAERT, *Les bibles d'Augustin*, in *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, 37 (2006), p. 513-531 (519-520); P. BORGOMEIO, *L'Église...* [see n. 19], p. 140-143; M. PONTET, *L'exégèse...* [see n. 3], p. 441-446 (and concerning s. 46 in notes 108-110, 113, 135).

³⁴ S. 46, 36.

³⁵ S. 46, 36. Referring to the etymology of 'companions' ('to eat bread together'), and Ps. 55, 12-13, the label 'companions' for Augustine stands for the Donatists (because they also celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist). Augustine here refers to 'the friends of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3, 29, s. 46, 36). Augustine reads this pericope in an anti-Donatist way as a description of the ideal Catholic bishop: M. SHERWIN, 'The friend of the Bridegroom stands and listens': an analysis of the term 'amicus sponsi' in Augustine's ac-

made their own tables, erected altars against altars.³⁶ Augustine clearly applies this to the Donatist schism.

He continues:

And if you think the noonday or south means Africa—though I could demonstrate that parts of Egypt are more to the south of the world, and those regions burnt up by the sun where it never rains, because that's the south where it is boiling hot at midday. But there in fact the desert is full of thousands of the servants of God. So if we want to pick out southerly places, why shouldn't he rather be feeding his flock there, and taking his rest there, seeing that it was foretold beforehand, 'the desert places of the wilderness shall be fruitful (Is. 5, 17)'? But fine, I agree, let the noonday or south be Africa, Africa be the noonday. Here are the bad companions. The overseas Church, sailing to Africa in one of its members, is anxious not to go astray, and calls upon its bridegroom and says to him, I hear there are lots of heretics in Africa, I hear there are lots of rebaptizers in Africa. But I also hear that your people are there in no less numbers. I hear both things. But what I want to hear from you is which are yours. 'Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you feed your flock, where you lie down in the noonday', in that noonday to the south where I hear there are two parties, one the party of Donatus, the other an integral part of your whole. You tell me, please, where I am to go, 'lest perchance as one veiled', that is unrecognized, 'I come upon the flocks of your companions', I stumble on the flocks of heretics trying to place stone upon stone that will be thrown down, lest I rush in among the rebaptizers, 'tell me.'³⁷

Augustine thus marshals two lines of arguments: (1) '*in meridie*' actually does not *per se* refer to Africa. It could, *e.g.*, also refer to Egypt, because of the fervor of spiritual people there (Ps. 90, 12; Is. 58, 10).³⁸ And (2) even if one accepts that 'in the noonday/South' means Africa, this implies that it is actually the Church overseas which is asking the question about the Church in Africa. This implies that the Church overseas fears the Donatists as the companions to be avoided.³⁹

count of divine friendship and the ministry of Bishops, in *Augustinianum*, 38 (1998), p. 197-214.

³⁶ S. 46, 36.

³⁷ S. 46, 37.

³⁸ S. 46, 38.

³⁹ S. 46, 37.

Fifth and sixth replies to Donatist Sg. 1, 6-7: goats instead of sheep,⁴⁰ message of unity and universality⁴¹

Augustine furthers his argument by observing that Sg. 1, 7 orders the Donatists to feed their goats, which is completely contrary to Peter's commission, namely to feed Christ's (instead of his own) sheep (instead of the Donatist goats, which—in Augustine's biblical exegesis—refer to those on the left hand, those who have left the Church).⁴²

Reflecting on Sg. 1, 6-7, Augustine finally observes that this passage contains additional anti-Donatist warnings. The description, 'o fair one among women', refers to the beauty of the bride (the Church), and Augustine immediately comments that beauty can only be found in unity and not in discord. The utterance, 'unless you recognize yourself', is an appeal to recognize oneself

⁴⁰ That the Donatists have to feed their goats, is contrasted by Augustine with Peter who had to feed Christ's sheep (Jn. 21, 15-17: Peter's three-fold confession of love, resulting in: 'feed my lambs', 'feed my sheep', often associated with 1 Cor. 1, 12-13, stressing that the sheep belong to Christ and not to Peter/the apostles). See also: ss. 138, 8; 146, 2; 2290, 3. Similar references are to be found in: s. 285, 6; *Ep.* 93, 9.24-25.28, where Augustine (more concisely)—besides 'your goats', also stresses other differences: to the flocks/to the tabernacles of the shepherds' (instead of the one flock/the one tabernacle of the one shepherd, indicating the division(s) created by Donatism). (Cf. also s. 295, 5; *Contra Gaudentium* 1, 17, 18).

⁴¹ *Anti-heretical/unitarian beauty of the bride*: S. 138, 8 expresses this even stronger. Only the true bride, with genuine self-knowledge ("that you are one, that you are to be found among all nations, that you are chaste, that you must not be seduced by the perverse conversation of evil companions"), is beautiful, contrary to other women—heresies—who are only beautiful from the outside but not in the inside. For that reason, the bridegroom addresses the bride severely, in order to save her. S. 95, 5 refers to Sg. 1, 7 'O gracious among women', within the context of the parable of the marriage banquet, however without elaborating the meaning of this verse. *C. faust.* 22, 38 links this verse with the undefiled beauty of Sarah. The Pharaoh intended to 'defile' her because Abraham told him she was his sister. Sarah however was not defiled, because she symbolizes the Church, married secretly to Christ. *Self-knowledge of the bride*: S. 295, 5, referring to the call to self-knowledge of Sg. 1, 7, collects biblical *topoi* on the self-knowledge of the Church as universal (Gn. 22, 18; Ps. 50, 1; Ps. 2, 8; Ps. 19, 4) and unified (Jn. 10, 16). According to *En. Ps.* 66, 4 this call is a reminder for the Church that she is created in God's image and likeness, and thus has the vocation to not sin.

⁴² S. 46, 37.

in Christ, namely to believe in Christ as he is: in heaven and universally spread throughout the whole world.

Reply to other Donatist topoi concerning the 'African nature' of the Church⁴³

Augustine responds to a similar Donatist use of Habak. 3, 3: "*Deus ab Africo ueniet, et sanctus de monte umbroso.*"⁴⁴

The heretics are announcing another Christ who is born in Africa and goes through the world. I'm asking you what it means, God will come from Africa. If you said, 'God has only remained in Africa,' you would certainly be saying something shameful enough. But now you also say, 'He will come from Africa'. We know where Christ was born, where he suffered, where he ascended into heaven, where he sent his disciples from, where he filled them with the Holy Spirit, where he instructed them to evangelize the whole world, and they complied, and the world all over is filled with the gospel. And you say: 'God will come from Africa!'⁴⁵

Augustine replies that the Donatists should carefully read the second part of the verse, namely "*de monte umbroso.*" The *Partus Donati* originates from Numidia, a region lacking in shady mountains, consisting only of plains.⁴⁶ Augustine explains that other Biblical texts explain the two parts of Habak. 3, 3. The meaning of "*Deus ab Africo ueniet*" is revealed first by Jos. 15, 8 ("Jebus from Africa, which is Jerusalem") and subsequently by Lk. 24, 46 ("It was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise again on the third day, and for repentance and the forgiveness of sins to be preached in his name throughout all nations, beginning

⁴³ *Epistula ad catholicos de secta donatistarum* 16, 42 offers an additional anti-Donatist scriptural-geographic argument. Augustine rhetorically asks the Donatists why they do not apply the text of Ez. 28, 2 to themselves. In this text, the prophet rebukes the prince of Tyre—Carthage is sometimes called Tyre—thinking to be better than Daniel (who confesses his own sins in Ez. 28, 3).

⁴⁴ The translation of the *Vetus Latina* 'ab Africo' was corrected by Jerome into 'ab austro'. For Augustine's anti-Donatist exegesis of Habak. 3, 3, see: Cl. LEPELLEY, *L'Afrique et sa diversité vues par Saint Augustin*, in: *Saint Augustin, la Numidie et la société de son temps. Actes du colloque Sempam-Ausonius Bordeaux, 10-11 oct. 2003*, (Scripta Antiqua, 14), Bordeaux – Paris, Ausonius Ed., 2005, p. 29-43 (33-34).

⁴⁵ S. 46, 38.

⁴⁶ S. 46, 39.

from Jerusalem"). Jos. 15, 8 thus links 'Africa' with Jerusalem, and Lk. 24, 46 links Jerusalem with Christ, adding that Jerusalem is the beginning of a universal project. This explanation is confirmed by the meaning of the second part of Habak. 3, 3 "*et sanctus de monte umbroso*," which clearly refers to the Mount of Olives, where, Augustine notes, Christ ascended into heaven. Reading the following verse of Habak. 3, "his shadow will cover the mountains and the earth is full of his glory," in combination with the aforementioned Lk. 24, 46 ("beginning from Jerusalem throughout all nations") and Christ's last words at the moment of his Ascension on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1, 7-8: "you will be witness to me ... as far as the whole earth"), again clearly confirms the universal nature of the Church.⁴⁷

A final 'geographical' argument of the Donatists is their reference to the name of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15, 21), who was forced to carry Christ's cross. They claim that Cyrene is located in Africa, and—according to Augustine—they argue that Christ consequently lived in Africa. Augustine first of all explains that Cyrene is to be found in Libya/Pentapolis. This region lies next to Africa, but belongs to the East (because, for example, it is the Eastern emperor who dispatches a governor to Cyrene). Augustine continues:

My answer is very short. Where the party of Donatus is, there you won't find Cyrene; where Cyrene is, there you won't find the party of Donatus. Error is convicted by the plainness of the truth. ... It's perfectly plain, brothers, that the Church in the Pentapolis is Catholic, that the party of Donatus is not to be found there.⁴⁸

Moreover, Augustine preaches, even if Simon of Cyrene would have been an African, this does not imply that the Church is limited to Africa. Otherwise Arimathea—referring to the person of Joseph of Arimathea who took care of the body of Christ—would also be entitled to claim that the Church is restricted to Arimathea. Returning to Simon of Cyrene, and linking him with another anti-Donatist theme that Augustine actually neglected in the sermon—his legitimization of imperial coercive measures against the Donatists—Augustine quite abruptly ends his sermon:

⁴⁷ S. 46, 40.

⁴⁸ S. 46, 41.

Or if you are better pleased with the man who was pressganged, that is to say forced to carry the cross, it follows that the Catholic emperors are quite right in forcing you into unity.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Ivonne Tholen states that Augustine's sermons addressing the Donatist controversy show us not so much Augustine the theologian, but the bishop of Hippo as a caretaker of souls. The care of souls includes explaining why a heretical position is wrong and should be condemned. Augustine is aware of the double fear Donatism could cause in his flock: the fear of losing salvation and the fear of contamination through the sins of others. The idea of complete sanctity could be attractive for his community. The fear of his community, the attraction of Donatism, and Augustine's reaction in his sermons deal with the question of salvation: how can one reach it, who can administer it, what determines it, can one lose it? His sermons are oriented to his community. For this reason he does not deal with Donatism in an abstract or historical-critical way, but very concretely: 'what does a Donatist say and do?' He approaches Donatist beliefs in his sermons from the perspective of how they appear in the contemporary scene, from the questions and fears of the community he addresses. For this reason there is a strong continuity in content in his sermons despite the length of time Augustine preached against the Donatists. Since Augustine remains convinced of the righteousness of his standpoint, he does not see the need to change his homiletic expositions. Moreover, continuity is a rhetorical tool: by repeating the same message he profoundly and invariably teaches his flock the Catholic standpoint, substantiated by biblical arguments. Our above analysis of Augustine's exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7 in his preaching activities concurs with Tholen's thesis above.⁵⁰ Perhaps, we would even suggest going a step further. Was Augustine's refutation of the Donatist exegesis addressed to the Donatists, or rather expounded only for his own Catholic flock? The former presupposes that the Donatists—for a long period of time the majority Church in Africa, counting influential people and intellectuals amongst its members—had a very poor knowledge of scriptural

⁴⁹ S. 46, 41.

⁵⁰ I. THOLEN, *Die Donatisten...* [see n. 1].

exegesis (the examples of Sg. 1, 6-7 and Habak. 3, 3 in s. 46) and of geography (with the extra example of Simon of Cyrene). The latter could imply that Augustine presents, or even manipulates, Donatist Biblical arguments in a polemical way.

Sermo 46 serves as a litmus test of Augustine's presentation and refutation of the Donatist exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7. M. Cameron gives an appropriate summary of *sermo* 46: "Augustine effectively turns back the subject of the bride's question from Donatist purity to Catholic charity."⁵¹ Departing from the application of the 'bad shepherds' of Ez. 34 to the Donatist fold, he tackles Sg. 1, 6-7, after first having pleaded to opt for less complicated Biblical passages. Subsequently, he argues that the Donatists used incorrect interpunction, thus misreading the verses. Augustine suggests that Sg. 1, 6-7 does not *per se* refer to Africa, and even if read it in that light, it actually contains a condemnation of the Donatists. As a skilled advocate, Augustine seems to have countered all arguments from the Donatist counter party and seems even to turn an argument *pro* the Donatists into a charge *contra*.

Reconstruction of the Donatist exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7: an interpretative hypothesis

The following section will offer an exegetical hypothesis which could provide a reconsideration of the Augustinian reading of the debate between Catholics and Donatists about the biblical passage of Sg. 1, 6-7.

The portrait of the Donatists: an Augustinian falsification?

First, it is useful to reconsider critically the picture of the Donatists drafted by Augustine. He depicted his opponents as people incapable of understanding the Holy Scriptures,⁵² as hypocrites whose bad actions were the opposite of their good words.⁵³

⁵¹ M. CAMERON, *Augustine's Use of the Song of Songs against the Donatists*, in F. VAN FLETEREN, J. C. SCHNAUBELT (eds.), *Augustine: Biblical Exegete* (Collectanea Augustiniana), New York, Peter Lang, 2001, p. 99-127 (110).

⁵² See *Contra epistolam Parmeniani* 1, 3, 5; 1, 14, 21; 2, 1, 1 and 2, 4, 8.

⁵³ See *Psalmus contra partem Donati* 22: "Homines multum superbi, qui se iustos dicunt esse. Sic fecerunt conscissuram et allare contra allare. Diabolo se tradiderunt, cum pugnant de traditione et crimen quod commiserunt, in alios volunt transferre. Ipsi tradiderunt Libros et nos audent accusare"; but also *Contra epistolam Parmeniani* 2, 10, 20 and *Psalmus contra partem Donati* 36.

This image of the Donatist party seems perhaps more a polemical portrait than a truthful historic profile of his opponents. During the debate, Catholics and Donatists continually charged each other with terrible misdeeds. The association of the enemy with the Devil, for example, was a traditional rhetorical *topos* used by both sides.⁵⁴ Similarly, the charge of *traditio* was used by both churches to mark the other side.⁵⁵ Augustine was not immune to this vitriolic setting: his works contain stereotypical charges against the Donatists. He did not recoil from manipulating history to discredit the Donatist party, *e.g.*, presenting the story of the martyrdom of the bishops Marculus⁵⁶ and Donatus of Bagai as two suicides and, at the same time, exculpating Catholics from the charge of being their murderers.⁵⁷ Augustine wanted to

⁵⁴ Regarding Augustine's works see S. POQUE, *Le langage symbolique...* [see n. 19], p. 20. The alliance between the Devil, the Roman authority and the (Catholic) *traditores* and their common guilt is a *topos* of the Donatist martyrological literature as testified by *Passio Dalivi*, *Salurnini presbyteri et aliorum*, *Passio Marculi*, *Passio Maximiani et Isaac* and *Passio Donati*.

⁵⁵ See *Psalmus contra partem Donati* 65.

⁵⁶ See A. MANDOUZE, 'Marculus', in: A. MANDOUZE, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire 1. Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303-533)*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 1982, p. 696. See also H. DELEHAYE, *Domnus Marculus*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 53 (1935) p. 81-89. About the *Passio Marculi* see P. MASTANDREA, *Passioni di martiri donatisti (BHL 4473 e 5271)*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 113 (1995), p. 39-88 and his previous work *Le interpolazioni nei codici della Passio Marculi*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 108 (1990), p. 279-91. For a critical edition of the *Passio Marculi* see J.-L. MAIER, *Le dossier du Donatisme* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, 134-135), Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1987-1989, I, p. 275-91. An English translation is available in M. TILLEY, *Donatist Martyr Stories: the Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1996, p. 77-87.

⁵⁷ For the ancient sources on the issue see first of all the *Passio Marculi*. The bishop of Milevis dedicated some lines of his works against the Donatists to Marculus: see OPTATUS, *Tractatus contra Donatistas* III, 6. Augustine mentions this Donatist bishop various times, often together with Donatus of Bagai: see *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus* 11, 15; *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2, 14, 32; 2, 20, 46; 2, 88, 195; *Contra Cresconium* 3, 49, 54; *Breviculus collationis cum Donatistas* 3, 8, 13. For a brief overview of the issue see B. QUINOT, *Marculus et Donatus martyrs donatistes* (Bibliothèque Augustinienne, 30), Paris, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1967, p. 771-773, for a more elaborate study see M. DALVIT, *Ecclesia martyrum. Analisi del corpus martirologico donatista* (Tesi di dottorato Università degli studi di Padova), Padova, 2013, p. 381-387; 559-563. For an analysis of the issue

'break' the Donatist historical reconstruction of the events. Marculus and Donatus of Bagai cannot have been murdered the way Donatists said, because—as Augustine said—Romans did not typically kill prisoners in that manner.⁵⁸ For the bishop of Hippo this verified that the Donatists had committed suicide by jumping from a cliff, as *Circumcelliones* did daily *ex Marculiano illo magisterio*. Augustine did not mind discussing Marculus and Donatus' death with Donatists: he preferred to absolve the Catholic Church from its guilt and its cooperation with Rome for killing the two bishops.

The image of the Donatists depicted by Augustine as incapable even of reading correctly the punctuation of the Song of Songs seems too caricatured. The bishop of Hippo could have sketched this image merely to denigrate his opponents and to obscure their real exegesis, which had been certainly more solid and difficult to defeat. It seems no coincidence then that in s. 46 Augustine creates a dialogue with a fictitious Donatist and not a specific opponent—like Parmenianus, Petilianus, Gaudentius or Cresconius, whose works and theses were all known and verifiable.

The hypothesis that the Donatists made a change in their theological line to adapt it to the replies of Augustine seems implausible. This would have been a very strong polemical charge against his opponents, but the bishop of Hippo did not mention it at all. This silence would appear too strange in a scathing debate in which the only aim of the counterparts was to prove that the other was wrong.

Critical readers of Augustine are required to apply the so-called 'hermeneutic of suspicion' to the bishop of Hippo's works against the Donatists, due to their highly polemical nature. Do-

regarding the suicide/homicide of Marculus, see also M. DALVIT, *The Catholic Construction of Donatist Key Figures: a Critical Reading and Interpretation of Augustine and Optatus*, in A. DUPONT, M. A. GAUMER, M. LAMBERIGTS (eds.), *The Uniquely African Controversy: Studies on Donatist Christianity* (Late Antique History and Religion, 7), Leuven, Peeters Publishers, forthcoming.

⁵⁸ The *precipitatio* however was a common punishment for impious acts or political crimes. See A. ROSSI, *Muscae moriturae Donatistae circumvolant. La costruzione di identità plurali nel cristianesimo dell'Africa romana*, Torino, Ledizioni, 2013, p. 256-257; R. CACITTI, *Furiosa turba. I fondamenti religiosi dell'eversione sociale, della dissidenza e della contestazione ecclesiale dei Circumcellioni d'Africa*, Milano, Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 2006, p. 93-101.

ing so with respect to the key passage of the Song of Songs enables readers to appreciate the material from a new point of view.

Augustine shifts the center of the exegetical debate

As Augustine himself seems initially to imply in *Epistula ad Catholicos de secta Donatistarum* 16, 40 (401-409),⁵⁹ the center of the debate had not been on the meaning of ‘*meridium*’, but on which of the two churches ‘*in meridie*’ was the real one.

Interrogat fortasse quid ad eius communionem pertineat in meridie, id est ubi sponsus eius pascat et cubet in meridie, quia suos pascit et in suis cubat.⁶⁰

In the first section of *Ep. cath.* 16, 40, Augustine does not mention anything about a strict interpretation by Donatists that read Africa as the unique soil on which the true Church existed. It would seem, therefore, that the Donatist party did not use the passage to identify Africa as the unique land of the real Church;⁶¹

⁵⁹ “Il Monceaux, accogliendo alcune indicazioni del Petschenig, pone la data verso la fine del 401 (...). E sulla base degli stessi indizi, Congar, e con lui anche Quinot, preferisce una data tra il 401 e il 402. Per Langa, l’opera appartiene al terzo periodo della produzione letteraria antidonatista di Agostino, 401-405, e va posta tra il settembre 401 e l’agosto del 403 (...). Ma non mancano di quelli che spostano la data oltre questo termine o «poco prima del 405» come La Bonnardière, o addirittura nel 409 come Cl. Lepelley.”, A. LOMBARDI, *Lettera ai Cattolici sulla setta dei Donatisti. Introduzione* (Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, 15/2), Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, 1999, p. 379.

⁶⁰ *Epistula ad Catholicos de secta Donatistarum* 16, 40.

⁶¹ This hypothesis is not very credible considering the attested existence of a Donatist community in Rome whose members have been called “*montenses*”. This expression occurred for the first time in Optatus, *Tractatus contra Donatistas* II, 4, 5 qualifying the Donatists of Rome: “*sic speluncam quandam foris a civitate cratibus saepserunt, ubi ipso tempore conventiculum habere potuissent, unde Montenses appellati sunt.*” This etymology is transmitted in Arnobius Junior, *Praedestinatus* 1, 44; 69; Isidorus Hispalensis, *De haeresibus liber* 43; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Ety-mologiarum sive Originum libri XX* 8, 5, 35 and Hieronymus, *Chronicon, ad annum 355 §18h*. The word “*montenses*” occurs various time in Augustine’s works: see *Ep.* 53, 1, 2: “*ex transverso ex Africa ordinatum miserunt, qui paucis praesidens Afris in urbe Roma Montensium vel Cutzupitarum vocabulum propagavit*”; *Contra litteras Pelitiani* 2, 108, 247: “*non est ergo in sola Africa, vel solis Afris, episcopum Romam paucis Montensibus, et in Hispaniam domui unius mulieris ex Africa mittentibus*”; *Epistula ad Catholicos de secta Donatis-*

they used it to separate *in Africa* the Church of the Saints from the Church of the Traitors. In this work Augustine does not deny this reading: so it seems probable that Donatists read Sg. 1, 6-7 as an pure indication of *which* is the real Church *in Africa*.

Some years later (408-414), Augustine shifted the center of the dispute towards the meaning of '*meridium*', as we can see in s. 46. Here the bishop of Hippo, who some years earlier presented a different version of the Donatist exegesis of the passage, reports that the party of Donatus read the term '*meridium*' as a precise indication of the African soil as the unique land on which the real Church exists. It is hard to believe that Augustine could have misunderstood the Donatist interpretation of Song of Songs. He frequently debated with Donatist representatives over the years. He knew well Parmenian's work as well as Petilian's, Cresconius', Tyconius' and Gaudentius'. It is very difficult to say that the Donatist exegetical line on Sg. 1, 6-7 was not shared (and developed in their works) by any one of the major theologians. So why did Augustine not ascribe this peculiar exegesis to any one thinker? None of the Donatist bishops probably ever supported this exegetical interpretation: in fact, it could be simply a fabrication.

larum 3, 6: "*Si enim sanctae Scripturae in Africa sola designaverunt Ecclesiam et in paucis Romae Cultupitanis vel Montensibus et in domo vel patrimonio unius Hispanae mulieris, quidquid de chartis aliis aliud profertur, non tenent Ecclesiam nisi Donatistae*"; *De haeresibus* 69, 3: "*Isti haeretici in urbe Roma Montenses vocantur, quibus hinc ex Africa solent episcopum mittere, aut hinc illuc Afri episcopi eorum pergere, si forte ibi eum ordinare placuisset*." See A. Rossi, *Muscae moriturae*... [see n. 58], p. 194-206 and M. DALVIT, *Montenses. The Donatists' Ecclesiological Reflection About Habacuc's Prophecy*, in *Augustiniana*, 63 (2013), forthcoming. The Donatists had a community living in Rome. Why would they support a community in Rome if they thought that the real Church was only in Africa. It appears only an argument used by Catholics to attack the Donatist Church: the movement of Donatus was confined in Africa (probably because of the restraints ordered by the Empire allied with the Catholics) and in the Catholic point of view it was impossible to see it as the Church spread all over the earth prophesied by the Holy Scriptures. At least there are no testimonies in the few surviving sources about the importance of being African for a member of the Donatist Church. Their *Acts of the Martyrs* are not Africentric: the word "Africa" was never used by Donatist hagiographers, and no one cared about the topographical limits of the Donatist churches. Instead the only surviving Donatist documents present several testimonies about the importance of being related to the ancient martyrs and not to the traitors.

In his *sermo*, Augustine quotes “a Donatist”, someone without a name but who speaks for the whole movement, presenting the “official” exegesis of the Song of Songs. Talking of a generic unnamed “Donatist”, Augustine defends himself from possible charges of falsification too: some Donatist could effectively have reported to him this kind of argumentation, but even so, the lack of a specifically pointed finger suggests that no Donatist bishop known by Augustine seems to have supported it.

Actually we think that the Donatists would have consistently read the biblical passage as a useful text to prove *sola Scriptura* that the real Church had been *in Africa* and not, as Augustine has here suggested, that the real Church had been *only in Africa*. The bishop of Hippo shifted the center of the debate onto the term ‘*meridium*’ to strike at the Donatists, demonstrating their ignorance in considering Africa as the midday. In this way Augustine undermined the foundation of the Donatist interpretation of the true Church. If this suggestion is correct, then the bishop of Hippo can be seen repositioning the Donatist exegesis in order to better destabilize it.

A new center of the debate: the dialogue between bridegroom and bride

Reading the Song of Songs, Augustine focuses his attention on the interpretation of the reply given by the bridegroom to the bride’s request for a clue to finding him. Augustine reads the section in such a way that it condemns the Donatist party. Actually the words of the shepherd cannot be read merely in a negative light as a condemnation of the bride, but also could be seen as an indication to the women for finding him. The bridegroom invites the bride to ‘know herself’, and he seems to expect that the bride will be able to answer. If she is not able, or if she is confused, he offers her the advice to follow the footsteps of the flocks leading *in tabernaculis pastorum*.

We suppose that the final expression used by the bridegroom—*tabernacula pastorum*—and an alternative interpretation of the figure of the shepherd are useful for identifying which is the Church of Christ: the Donatist or the Catholic.

In s. 46 Augustine intends to clarify the reading of Ez. 34 through his preaching concerning ‘bad shepherds’. The bishop of Hippo is a true rhetorical master: he was able to use multiple lin-

guistic registers to imbue the same words with multiple meanings. When he was preaching the sermon, he knew that the use of some expressions would call attention to contemporary events. So Catholics could have understood the 'bad shepherds' who have killed the good sheep as an image of either the Donatist 'false martyrs'⁶² or the *Circumcelliones*. Catholics often charged the Donatists, especially the *Circumcelliones*, of living badly: they were often depicted as drunk homeless who did not work. They wandered with unmarried girls, sleeping with them during the night.⁶³ Augustine accuses the 'bad shepherds' of setting poor examples and not warning their flock of the trials of this world. When Augustine speaks about the imitation of Christ's suffering, it is possible to see a clear polemical argument against Donatist martyrdom: because of their false cause, their pain does not grant them a real martyrdom, a real imitation of Christ's suffering; thus these 'bad shepherds' have not prepared their flock for the imitation of Christ.

From the 'good shepherd' to the martyr: first step of the Donatist exegesis

The image of the 'good shepherds' could have had a martyrological meaning from the Donatists' point of view.⁶⁴ The 'Good

⁶² About the issue of the false martyrs in Augustine's works see *ss. suppl.* 2, 16-18; 2, 20; 15, 6; *Ep.* 173, 6; 204, 4; 262, 1; *Contra epistolam Parmeniani* 1, 8, 13; 1, 9, 15; *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2, 23, 52; 2, 49, 114.

⁶³ The image of the *Circumcelliones* depicted by Augustine is trenchant. They are stingy and loan sharks: "*Ipsos quoque non arbitror tam esse impudentes, ut audeant dicere, tam multis malis et sceleratis, qui in eorum parte sunt manifestis flagitiis et facinoribus perditi et inquinati, hoc est, avaris atque raptoribus, sive truculentis feneratoribus, sive cruentis circumcellionibus, Dominum non esse dicturum: Recedite a me, qui operamini iniquitatem; et tamen sciunt, vident, tenent, multos tales baptizare, multos a talibus baptizari; nec in eis Christi violant Sacramentum, etiam illi quibus displicent scelera illorum.*" *De unico baptismo contra Petilianum* 8, 14. The bishop of Hippo offers several times a long list of their crimes as, for example in *Contra epistolam Parmeniani* 2, 3, 6; *Post collationem contra Donatistas* 17, 22; *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2, 88, 195 and *Contra Gaudentium* 1, 28, 32. For a brief introduction to the *Circumcelliones* see R. CACITTI, *Furiosa turba...* [see n. 58] and also B. D. SHAW, *Who Were The Circumcellions?*, in: A. H. MERRILLS (ed.), *Vandals, Romans and Berbers. New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*, Aldershot-Burlington, Ashgate Publishing, 2004, 227-258; B. D. SHAW, *Sacred Violence...* [see n. 24].

⁶⁴ Also for the Catholics, see s. 138, 1-2. See also s. 253, 2.

Shepherd' is obviously interpreted first as Christ, who is also the first martyr and whose imitation is a requirement for each Christian. The Donatist movement was basically founded on martyrdom, and its history is strictly linked to the martyrs: starting from Lucilla's bone⁶⁵ through the *magisterium martyrii* of Marcus and Donatus of Bagai until the *decreta martyrum*⁶⁶ given by the Abitinian martyrs against Mensurius and Caecilianus. So if Christ is the 'Good Shepherd', then the martyrs, who are the perfect imitators of Christ, could probably be considered 'good shepherds' from the Donatists' point of view. The Donatists thus could have given the concept '*tabernaculum pastoris*' a martyrological connotation, reading it as a precise clue given by Christ to his loyal worshippers for finding the true Church. The assumption that the 'good shepherds' could be read as an allegory of the martyrs now becomes crucial to understanding Sg. 1, 6-7, to interpreting the bridegroom's words about their tents (*tabernacula pas-*

⁶⁵ See R. WIŚNIEWSKI, *Lucilla and the Bone: Remarks on an Early Testimony to the Cult of Relics*, in *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 4/1 (2011), p. 157-161 and A. ROSSI, *Muscae moriturae...* [see n. 58], p. 103-113.

⁶⁶ See *Passio Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 21: "Meanwhile neither the squalor of prison nor the pain of the flesh nor, finally, the lack of anything disturbed the martyrs of Christ. But already near to the Lord by their merits and their confession, they directed those who succeeded them, the renewed progeny of the Christian name, to be separated from all filth and communion with traitors by this warning: 'If anyone communicates with the traitors, that person will have no part with us in the heavenly kingdom'. (...) 'It is written', they said, 'in the Apocalypse, Whoever adds to this book one part of a letter or one letter, to him will the Lord add innumerable afflictions. And whoever blots them out, so will the Lord blot out his share from the Book of Life'. If, therefore, a part of a letter added or a letter omitted cuts off a person at the roots from the Book of Life and if such constitutes a sacrilege, it is necessary that all those who handed over the divine testaments and the honored laws of the omnipotent God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to be burned in profane fires should be tormented in the eternal flames of Gehenna and inextinguishable fire. And, therefore, as we have already said, 'if anyone communicates with the traitors, that person will not have a share with us in the heavenly kingdom'. Sharing in these judgments, one by one, they hurried off to the glory of suffering and to the ultimate testimony. Each one of the martyrs signed the judgment with their own blood. Accordingly, the Holy Church follows the martyrs and curses the treachery of the traitor Mensurius." About the issue of the Donatist presentation of these *decreta* during the *Collatio* of 411, see M. DALVIT, *Ecclesia martyrum...* [see n. 57], p. 303-310.

torum). Christ is giving a clue to the Church to find herself among the tents of the shepherds. Therefore, the alternative center of the debate is how to identify where the real Church is, and thus how we must read the expression '*tabernacula pastorum*'.

The core element of the (presumed) Donatist exegesis: the 'tabernaculum pastoris'

A good understanding of the correct meaning of the word '*tabernaculum*' is crucial for being able to comprehend the indication of the bridegroom from the Donatist point of view. '*Tabernaculum*' has had different meanings. In the Old Testament it was used to indicate the tent in which the Ark was kept by the Jews.⁶⁷ In the Roman world the term indicates the tent of a commander on a battlefield or in a *castrum*. Obviously the term got an allegorical meaning within the works of the Fathers: often Augustine read it as a symbol of the Church.⁶⁸ In this case, however, it cannot be read in that way: the bride is already an image of the Church, so Augustine's ascribing to the Donatists an understanding of the *tabernaculum* as the Church would be implausible. It must have another meaning, that made credible the Donatists' interpretation of the passage.

It is plausible that the Donatists interpreted '*tabernacula pastorum*' as a symbol of martyrs' tombs, as some examples of this usage had been present in African literature on martyrdom for almost two centuries. The tomb of the martyr was considered holy ground; a place of worship naturally linked with Christ and his real Church.

Traces of the link between 'tabernaculum' and martyrdom in two Donatist Passions

We think it is possible to find a peculiar link⁶⁹ among the terms *tabernaculum* and *martyr* by reading two African Passions,

⁶⁷ For some examples see Ex. 26-27; Lev. 1, 1-5; Deut. 31, 15; 1Chr. 15, 1; Acts 7, 44 and finally Apoc. 15, 5.

⁶⁸ See *Enarrations in psalmos* 14, 1; 18, 2, 5; 29, 1, 1; 54, 21; *Contra Faustum manichaeum* 6, 9, 1; 19, 10; *In Iohannis epistolam ad Parthos tractatus decem* 2, 3 and *De civitate Dei* 21, 27.4-5.

⁶⁹ It is useful to highlight also that in *De Corona* 9, 1, giving a reference to Apoc. 15, 5, Tertullian talks about *tabernaculum martyrii*: "In short, what patriarch, what prophet, what Levite, or priest, or ruler, or at a later pe-

the *Passio Salsae*⁷⁰ and the *Passio Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*. Both of them seem to have been written in the final years of the 4th century, perhaps in the first quarter of the 5th.⁷¹

riod what apostle, or preacher of the gospel, or bishop, do you ever find the wearer of a crown? I think not even the temple of God itself was crowned; as neither was the ark of the testament, nor the tabernacle of witness (*tabernaculum martyrii*), nor the altar, nor the candlestick crowned though certainly, both on that first solemnity of the dedication, and in that second rejoicing for the restoration, crowning would have been most suitable if it were worthy of God". The *Vulgata* has here *tabernaculum testimonii* but *Vetus Lat. Cod. A* reads *tabernaculum martyrii*. This second reading is extremely rare: maybe its scarce use has depended on the possible confusion about the meaning of *martyr*. The Greek term was naturally associated with the ones who had given their lives for their faith in Christ, so it becomes clear that the Latin translation of the greek μάρτυς, when linked to the *tabernaculum* from the Old Testament, had to be *testimonium* instead of *martyr*. We know for sure that the expression used by Tertullian is a direct reference to the biblical "tent of the Alliance", but we think that the meaning and the reading of it could have changed from the Donatists' point of view. It would be read as the key of the new Alliance between Christ and the Church: the new tent in which the Lord finds home among his worshippers is the grave of those who died for him. For the Donatists the real Church of Christ, the new tent of the Alliance, would have been only the one built metaphorically on the martyrs' tombs.

⁷⁰ See A. MANDOUZE, 'Salsa', in A. MANDOUZE, *Prosopographie chrétienne...* [see n. 56], p. 1022-1024. See A. M. PIREDDA, *Passio Sanctae Salsae* (Quaderni di Sandalion, 10), Sassari, Gallizzi Editore, 2002; P. MONCEAUX, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion arabe*, Paris, Ernest Leroux Éditeur, 1901-1923, vol. III, p. 163-168.

⁷¹ Two scholars place the composition of the *Passio Salsae* in the first part of the 4th century: see O. GRANDIDIER, *Tipasa. Ancien évêché de la Maurétanie Césarienne*, in *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie du Diocèse d'Alger*, 5 (1897), p. 125-175; 6 (1897), p. 177-225 (179); S. GSELL, *Recherches archéologiques en Algérie*, Paris, Ernest Leroux Éditeur, 1983, p. 4. Paul Monceaux situates it between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century: "Comme beaucoup d'autres relations africaines de martyres, la *Passio Salsae* paraît dater du temps d'Augustin." P. MONCEAUX, *Histoire littéraire...* [see n. 71], p. 167-168. Recently Piredda agreed with Monceaux on the dating: "Gravi torbidi sconvolsero l'Africa tra il 408 ed il 411, anno della Conferenza di Cartagine che condannò il Donatismo (...). E' probabile che proprio in questo periodo possa essere stata composta la *Passio Salsae*, come sembrano testimoniare sia il brano relativo ai templi pagani in rovina, sia la preoccupazione dell'agiografo di mostrare la fedeltà dei cattolici di Tipasa all'impero romano. La loro santa patrona, indigena, ma cattolica e quindi fedele a Roma, non aveva accettato le empie offerte fatte sulla sua tomba per volgere il suo aiuto a favore dei barbari, anzi si era opposta

In the first, the tomb of the saint is called three times '*tabernaculum*', and once specifically '*tabernaculum martyris*'.⁷² This text could be interpreted as the result of a Catholic interpolation of a Donatist Passion.⁷³ The aim of this type of falsification was 'catholicizing' the martyrological heritage of the saint to drive more easily the Donatist worshippers of Tipasa to the Catholic Church. It is important to note that the Donatist hagiographer who used the term *tabernaculum* linked its meaning to martyrdom by designating the tomb of the martyr.

In the *Passio Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*⁷⁴ the tortured martyr Ampelius is driven to jail, tied with his brothers in

impedendo che potesse celebrarsi sulla sua tomba un refrigerium blasfemo." A. M. PIREDDA, *Passio Sanctae Salsae*... [see n. 71], p. 40. See also M. M. MORCIANO, *Tipasa d'Algeria: un esempio di pianificazione antica*, in A. MASTINO, P. RUGGERI (eds.), *L'Africa Romana. Atti del X convegno di studio. Oristano 11-13 dicembre 1992*, Sassari, 1994, 403-418 (417). For a *status quaestionis* of the dating of the *Passio Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, see F. DOLBEAU, *La "Passion" des martyrs d'Abilina: remarques sur l'établissement du texte*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 121 (2003), p. 273-296 (275, n. 13) and E. ZOCCA, *Antropologia e filologia: il caso della Passio dei martiri di Abilene (BHL 7492)*, in A. SANTIEMMA (ed.), *Scritti in onore di Gilberto Mazzoleni*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2010, p. 389-427 (427).

⁷² See *Passio Salsae* 12: "*Repente igitur ut corpus iam sacratum aer aspexit, quievit mare, venti cesserunt, fluctus elisi sunt, spumae evanuerunt, et tempestas stetit in aura et siluerunt fluctus eius. Tum ab omnibus corpus evehitur et congruo veneramine martyrium consecratur potius quam humatur, brevique admodum tabernaculo, ad custodiam temporum propagandam, colenda potius quam condenda sepelitur*"; 13: "*Iniit impius quasi sub devotione commentum, ut huius martyris tabernaculum veluti vota soluturus intraret et contra Romanam et Christianam plebem putaret se martyris auxilium pro barbaris posse conducere. (...) Mox enim sequitur indignatio divina blasphemum et in ipso vestibulo tabernaculi deiectum equo vix eum queunt armigeri sublevare.*"

⁷³ See M. DALVIT, *Ecclesia martyrum*... [see n. 57], p. 169-255.

⁷⁴ See E. ZOCCA, *Antropologia e filologia*... [see n. 72]; J. FONTAINE, *Passio sanctorum Saturnini, Dativi, Felicis, Ampelii et sociorum*, in R. HERZOG, P. L. SCHMIDT, *Nouvelle histoire de la littérature latine*, vol. V, Turnhout, Brepols, 1993, p. 584-585; F. SCORZA BARCELLONA, *L'agiografia donatista*, in M. MARIN, C. MORESCHINI (eds.), *Africa cristiana. Storia, religione, letteratura*, Brescia, Editrice Morcelliana, 2002, p. 125-151 (140-145); A. DEARN, *The Abilitian Martyrs and the Outbreak of the Donatist Schism*, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004) p. 1-18; F. DOLBEAU, *La "Passion"*... [see n. 72]; P. FRANCHI DE' CAVALIERI, *La Passio dei martiri abilitinesi*, in P. FRANCHI DE' CAVALIERI, *Note Agiografiche* 8, in *Studi e Testi*, 65 (1935), p. 3-71; M. DALVIT, *Rogo Christe, tibi laudes. Analisi della Passio Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri*

faith, “*quasi lumen in dominicum*”⁷⁵ *tabernaculum*”.⁷⁶ The section of the Passion containing this quotation was undoubtedly written by some Donatist hagiographer, and here emerges again a link between martyrdom and ‘*tabernaculum*’. The word ‘*lumen*’ has to be read and translated as ‘admirable example’. At the same time the expression ‘*tabernaculum dominicum*’ is quite an *unicum*. More or less a half century earlier, Cyprian used the term ‘*dominicum*’ referring to the Eucharistic sacrifice.⁷⁷ It is possible that the meaning of this expression could be more symbolic than literal. The martyr Ampelius is driven to jail as an admirable example of the indwelling of the Eucharist; in other words, as an admirable example of the martyrial sacrifice of Christ. In short, here

et aliorum, in *Ager Veleias*, 4.07-4.09 (2009) and M. DALVIT, *Ecclesia martyrum*... [see n. 57], p. 298-376.

⁷⁵ “I termini *collecta* e *dominicum* suscitano non poche difficoltà. In primo luogo non è del tutto sicura la loro interpretazione. Gli studiosi in linea di principio convengono nel ritenere che il primo indichi le riunioni liturgiche, mentre il secondo dovrebbe qualificare in modo più specifico la celebrazione sacramentale, potendo anche rimandare concretamente al luogo in cui questa stessa di celebrava, cioè la basilica. [...] il raro *dominicum*, prima di questa *Passio*, è attestato nel suo uso assoluto solo una volta in Cipriano (*Ep.* 63, 16)—there the term is used by the bishop of Carthage with an eucharistic meaning; *ndr*—ed un'altra nello Pseudo-cipriano *De Spectaculis* (5).” E. ZOCCA, *Antropologia e filologia*... [see n. 72], p. 403-404.

⁷⁶ *Passio Daviti, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 14. “Che cosa si sia voluto significare per l'appunto con la comparazione non appare ben chiaro. Chiaro sarebbe certamente, se la lezione originaria fosse *quasi iam*: Ampelio entra così lieto nel carcere, quasi entrasse già in paradiso. Ma *quasi iam*, che del resto non ci è dato se non dai codici meno autorevoli, ha troppo l'aria di una correzione della *lectio difficilior*: *quasi lumen*. Forse *quasi lumen* si può prendere in un senso sostanzialmente poco diverso. Ampelio entra gioiosamente nel carcere, come un martire già coronato entra in cielo. I martiri erano riguardati altrettanti luci della reggia celeste e chiamati candelabri del tempio eternale, scriveva.” G. B. ROSSI, *La capsella argentea africana*, Roma, 1889, p. 24, citando in proposito quel passo di Florio di Lione: “*hi (Pietro e Paolo) sunt aeterno candelabra fulgida templo, Progenies lucis et pietatis honos.*” P. FRANCHI DE' CAVALIERI, *La Passio*... [see n. 75], p. 29-30.

⁷⁷ Cf. Cyprianus, *Epistula* 63, 16: “*Numquid ergo dominicum post cenam celebrare debemus, ut sic mixtum calicem frequentandis dominicis offeramus?*”; P. S. - Cyprianus, *De spectaculis* 5: “*(...) ausus secum sanctum in lupanar ducere, si potuisset, qui festinans ad spectaculum dimissus e dominico et adhuc gerens secum ut assolet eucharistiam inter corpora obscoena meretricum Christi sanctum corpus infidelis iste circumtulit plus damnationis meritis de itinere quam de spectaculi voluptate.*”

the Donatist hagiographer seems to have sketched a comparison between the martyrdom of Ampelius and the Eucharist, or rather the sacrifice of Christ.

These African texts seem then to suggest some sort of meaning in the word '*tabernaculum*' linked to martyrdom, reading '*tabernaculum pastoris*' as a symbolic reference to martyrs' tombs. So Donatists would have interpreted the 'shepherds' tents' as martyrs' tombs.⁷⁸ The Donatist party would have read the passage as an invitation for the bride to find the true Church metaphorically amongst martyrs' tombs. The Donatist Church has always recognized and called itself the Church of the Martyrs;⁷⁹ thus they would have read the passage as a clear indication of where to find the true Church.

Augustine probably knew the Donatists' reading and seems to have manipulated it instead of fighting it on the martyrdom front: he changed Donatists' interpretations, caricaturing his adversaries as not being able to read correctly a Scriptural phrase and its punctuation. Augustine realized that the epithet 'Church of martyrs' fitted them: for over a century they had used this moniker, as was common knowledge. It was impossible for the bishop of Hippo to hope to shift this appellation to the Catholic Church. So it seemed better for him to change in his works—especially in his sermons preached for his Catholic audience—their exegesis of the passage, depicting the Donatists as unable to read it correctly, and putting in their mouths an interpretation that he subsequently was able to discredit.

⁷⁸ For the cult linked to the martyrs' tombs in Augustine's works, see *De civitate Dei* 8, 26.1; 27.1; 22, 10; *Contra Faustum manichaeum* 20, 21; *ss. suppl.* 26, 12; *Enarrationes in psalmos* 59, 15; 121, 2; 137, 14; 140, 21; *Confessiones* 6, 2, 2.

⁷⁹ See *Passio Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* 22: "Therefore, these things being so, would anyone who is strong in the knowledge of divine law, endowed with faith, outstanding in devotion and most holy in religion, who realizes that God the Judge discerns truth from error, distinguishes faith from faithlessness, and isolates false pretense from sure and intact holiness, God who separates the upright from the lapsed, the unimpaired from the wounded, the just from the guilty, the innocent from the condemned, the custodian of the Law from the traitor, the confessor of the name of Christ from the denier, the martyr of the Lord from the persecutor, would that person think that *the church of the martyrs* and the conventicle of traitors is one and the same thing? Of course, no one does."

Conclusion

In the preceding pages we have tried to highlight Augustine's shift of the center of the debate about the exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7 over the years; going deep into Augustine's words, it was possible to clear away any encrustation made by the bishop of Hippo's shading and altering what we think it could have been the Donatist exegesis of the passage.

In a second moment, observing the link existing in African Christianity between *tabernaculum* and martyrdom, it was possible to reconstruct a plausible Donatist reading of Sg. 1, 6-7. Because of the confusion generated by the clash between Catholics and Donatists, it became crucial to find *sola Scriptura* arguments, but it also became necessary juridically to provide strong argumentation to prove definitively which was the real Church *in Africa*. The Donatist party tried to end the debate by proposing a lecture of Sg. 1, 6-7 focused on an allegorical reading in which the shepherds' tents—*tabernacula pastorum*—are the martyrs' tombs: so the Church would have found herself only among the *martyria*, as if to say that the only real Church could have been the *Ecclesia martyrum*, namely the Donatist Church.

General conclusion

Reading Sg. 1, 6-7, Augustine stresses that the Donatists—especially their leaders—are 'bad shepherds'. Moreover, they do not seem to be able to read '*in meridie*' of Sg. 1, 6-7 correctly, erring by (i) understanding it geographically as applying it to Donatist Africa, (ii) seeing it as confirming the unicity of the Donatist Church instead of condemning it—as they similarly err in their exegesis of Habak. 3, 3. *Sermo* 46 aptly illustrates how Augustine marshaled his polemical-exegetical arsenal against the Donatists.

The second section of this article suggests that the reliability of Augustine's representation of the Donatist exegesis could be debated. Reading his works, it is possible to see a shift in the exegetical debate on Sg. 1, 6-7. The center of the interpretative clash moves continuously: it passes from a strict interpretation of '*in meridie*' and of the allegorical sense of the words pronounced by the bride and the bridegroom to the Donatists' wrong reading of the interpunction of the Song of Songs. This shift could function as a clue of a possible manipulation of the Donatist exegesis

made by the bishop of Hippo. We have identified the expression '*tabernacula pastorum*' as the possible key to reconstruct what we believe could be a more plausible Donatist exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7. Linking the meaning of '*tabernaculum*' to martyrdom—the real cornerstone of the Donatist movement—through the recovery of a proper connection in ancient African Christian literature, we were able to build up a new interpretation of what a more genuine Donatist exegesis could have been. This hermeneutic view, different from the one presented by Augustine, appears to us more solid and coherent than the Augustinian portrait of the Donatists as unfit opponents, incapable even of reading correctly the punctuation of a biblical passage or of understanding its precise content.

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Summary. — This article first presents Augustine's exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7 in the Donatist controversy. This overview is based on his anti-Donatist *sermo* 46, which is devoted to this passage. Augustine states that the Donatists do not seem to be able to read '*in meridie*' of Sg. 1, 6-7 correctly, erring by (i) understanding it geographically as applying it to Donatist Africa, (ii) seeing it as confirming the uniqueness of the Donatist Church, and at the same time not realizing that it actually condemns the Donatist schism. The second section of this article presents a possible reconstruction of a Donatist reading of the two verses of the Song of Songs, different from the Donatist exegesis Augustine presented in his works, depicting the Donatists as incapable of reading correctly the punctuation of a biblical passage or of understanding its content. The expression '*tabernacula pastorum*' functioned as our key to reconstruct what we believe could be a more plausible Donatist exegesis of Sg. 1, 6-7. This reading would give the issue of martyrdom a central place, and ultimately, this topic was the real cornerstone of the Donatist movement.

Résumé — Cet article présente d'abord l'exégèse de Ct 1,6-7 par Augustin dans le cadre de la controverse donatiste. Cette vue d'ensemble est basée sur son sermon 46, anti-donatiste, consacré à ce passage. Augustin déclare que les donatistes ne semblent pas être en mesure de comprendre correctement *in meridie* de Ct 1,6-7, égarés qu'ils sont par (1) une compréhension géographique de ce terme, qu'ils appliquent à l'Afrique donatiste, (2) et par la volonté d'y voir une confirmation de l'unicité de l'Église donatiste, sans se rendre compte que, dans le même temps, cette interprétation condamne en fait le schisme donatiste. La deuxième partie de cet article présente une reconstruction possible d'une interprétation donatiste des deux versets du Cantique des Cantiques, différente de l'exégèse qu'Augustin attribue aux donatistes dans ses œuvres, où il les représente comme incapables de lire correctement la ponctuation d'un passage biblique et de comprendre son contenu. L'expression *tabernacula pastorum* fonctionne comme une clé de la reconstruction de ce que nous croyons pouvoir être une exégèse donatiste plus plausible de Ct 1,6-7. Cette lecture donnerait à la question du martyre une place centrale, et, en fin de compte, montrerait que ce thème est la véritable pierre angulaire du mouvement donatiste.

Zusammenfassung. — Dieser Artikel legt zuerst Augustinus Exegese des Hld 1, 6-7 im donatistischen Streit dar. Diese Übersicht basiert sich auf seine antidonatistische *sermo* 46, die sich auf diese Passage bezieht. Augustinus ist der Auffassung, dass die Donatisten nicht in der Lage seien, „*in meridie*“ im Hld 1, 6-7 korrekt zu lesen und sich irrten, indem sie (i) es geografisch verstünden und auf das donatistische Afrika bezögen und (ii) es als Bestätigung der Einzigartigkeit der donatistischen Kirche beschauten und zugleich nicht realisierten, dass es eigentlich das donatistische Schisma verurteile. Die zweite Hälfte dieses Artikels stellt eine mögliche Rekonstruktion einer donatistischen Interpretation der zwei Verse des Hohen Lieds dar, die von der donatistischen Exegese, die Augustinus in seinen Werken darlegt abweicht und in der er den Donatisten unterstellt, die Interpunktion der biblischen Passage nicht korrekt lesen zu können und den Inhalt nicht verstehen zu können. Der Ausdruck „*tabernacula pastorum*“ war unser Schlüssel zu einer unserer Meinung nach plausibleren donatistischen Exegese des Hld 1, 6-7. Diese Lesart würde das Thema des Martyriums zentral stellen und dieser Punkt war letztendlich der wirkliche Grundstein der donatistischen Bewegung.